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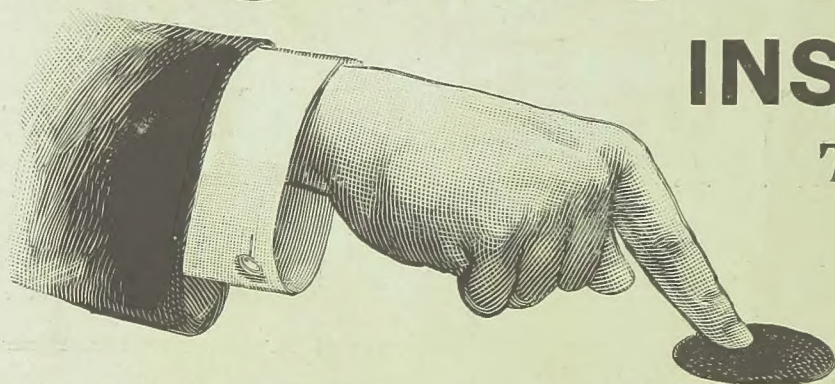
AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY JULIET ... *By James Mortimer.*
A THING THAT GLISTENED ... *By Frank R. Stockton.*
THE PISTOL SHOT ... *From the Russian of Alexander Pushkin.*

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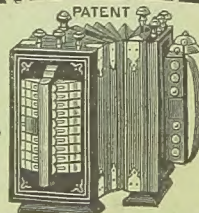
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Illustrated Penny Tales.

An Eighteenth Century Juliet.

By James Mortimer.

I.

FRENCH judicial annals are rich in strange and romantic episodes, but there are few narratives so replete with pathetic interest as the story of Gabrielle de Launay, a lady whose cause was tried before the High Court of Paris about the middle of the eighteenth century, and created a profound sensation throughout France at that epoch.

Mademoiselle de Launay was the only child of an eminent judge of Toulouse, where Gabrielle was born about the year 1730. M. de Launay, as the President of the Civil Tribunal of Toulouse, occupied a position of distinction, to which he was additionally entitled as a member of one of the leading families of the province. Between himself and the son of the late General de Serres, a deceased friend of the President de Launay, there existed an intimacy which gave colour to the belief entertained in the most exclusive social circles of Toulouse that young Captain Maurice de Serres was selected to be the future husband of the judge's beautiful daughter, then in her eighteenth year, whilst Maurice was nine years her senior. The birth and fortune of the two young people were equally in harmony, and the match thus appeared in every way suitable.

The surmises of the gossips were shortly confirmed by the formal announcement of the betrothal, and Maurice was on the point of asking the approval of his widowed mother, who resided in Paris, when an incident occurred which threatened to dash the cup of happiness from his lips. An official letter from the Minister of War reached Captain de Serres, instructing him, with all despatch, to rejoin his regiment, suddenly ordered abroad on active service in the far East.

The next morning, at an early hour, the young officer presented himself at the residence of President de Launay, greatly to the surprise of the worthy judge and his daughter, to whom he despairingly imparted the untoward tidings. The grief of Maurice and Gabrielle at the prospect of their sudden separation, for a long and uncertain period, was poignant in the extreme, and M. de Launay was himself profoundly distressed by this unexpected blow to his projects for his only child's happiness. After the first outburst, Maurice entreated the President to hasten the marriage and permit Gabrielle to accompany her husband to the Indies, if she would consent to undertake the voyage. Gabrielle joined her prayers to her lover's, but her father refused absolutely to listen to the proposal. Apart from his reluctance to part from his child for an indefinite term, the good President pointed out to the young man the hardships of a voyage to the most distant quarter of the globe, and the danger of exposure to a climate then regarded as fatal to many Europeans.

"Suppose Gabrielle, young as she is, were to sicken and die thousands of miles from her native land," said the President; "could you ever recover from the consequences of your rash imprudence, or could I forgive myself for my own weakness and folly?"

"Then, sir," exclaimed Maurice, passionately, "I only

know of one alternative. I will at once resign my commission, and adopt a new profession—I care not what, so that it shall not separate me from the woman I love."

M. de Launay shook his head, and with a grave smile replied that such an act would be unworthy of a French soldier and a scion of the noble house of De Serres. As a last resort, Maurice implored the President to sanction the immediate celebration of the marriage, with the understanding that Gabrielle should remain under her father's protection until her husband's return from foreign service, which, he anticipated, would be in about two years. To this request, also, M. de Launay returned an inflexible negative, without vouchsafing any reason, except that such was his decision.

Finding all his efforts vain, Maurice resigned himself to the inevitable, whilst Gabrielle sadly prepared to obey the command of one to whose behests she had ever yielded a dutiful submission, comforting herself, perchance, with the secret hope that her love and fidelity to Maurice would be more cherished, and invested with a greater heroism in his eyes, after two long, weary years of trial and separation.

In maintaining an attitude of firmness throughout the dilemma in which he had been placed by the inconsiderate passion of the young officer, M. de Launay manifested the possession of all the wisdom requisite in dealing with a difficult problem; but in adhering strictly to the French custom of decorously assisting at all interviews between unmarried young people of opposite sexes, and in failing to leave the lovers together alone for a short time, the President showed a deplorable want of knowledge of the human heart. The thought did not occur to him that a few tears, kisses, and vows of constancy would go far towards reconciling Maurice and Gabrielle to the sweet sorrow of parting, and that with these innocent crumbs of comfort the parental presence is totally uncongenial. Never in the history of love has it been deemed admissible that there should be witnesses to the tender words of farewell, the fond look in each other's eyes, the soft pressure of each other's hands, the whispered oath of eternal fidelity, and the many mysterious nothings which at such times are held sacred. Oblivious of these delicate considerations, the worthy President gave the young people no opportunity for a leave-taking which would have been to them a relief and a precious souvenir. Their parting was one of silence and dejection, but at the last moment Maurice found means to murmur in Gabrielle's ear: "I will be in the garden at midnight, under your window; meet me there to say good-bye." She spoke no word of reply, but a glance at her face assured him that his prayer had been heard and granted. With a tranquil smile, he bade farewell to the President, who again betrayed a sad lack of penetration in accompanying him to the gate, without the remotest suspicion that a clandestine midnight meeting of the lovers had been planned under his own eyes, and that the young officer's sudden composure arose from a joy he found it difficult to conceal.



II.

To both the lovers the hours seemed leaden indeed, until night came. At last, the church clock of Toulouse chimed three-quarters past eleven, and Gabrielle stole tremblingly down to the garden. The night was dark, and not a sound could the young girl hear but the tumultuous beating of her own heart, as she gently withdrew the bolts from the outer door and stepped lightly upon the soft green sward. Filled with dread of the consequences which might ensue if her secret meeting with Maurice should be discovered by her father, the poor child's remorse for her act of disobedience, as she regarded it, caused her to pause more than once, undecided whether to keep her tacit promise, or to creep back swiftly to her chamber. Before she could adopt the course dictated by prudence and submission to her father's will, she heard a light step behind her, and in another instant she was clasped in her lover's arms. Gently releasing herself, she placed her hand in his, and led him to a low bench close by, under the shadow of a tree. Seated side by side, they spoke in low whispers of their approaching separation, and of their mutual sorrow during Maurice's long absence from France. They talked of their occupations, and of the expedients each would adopt to make the time seem less wearisome. They arranged the employment of every day, and fixed the hours when each should breathe the other's name, and thus know that they were in communion of thought, though thousands of miles of ocean rolled between them, forgetting that in widely different climes the day to one would be night to the other. Then, perhaps, this geographical obstacle occurred to them, and they triumphantly vanquished it by promising to think of each other always, awake by day and in dreams by night, which would be the surest method of never being absent for an instant from each other's meditations.

In these lover-like communings the night sped quickly, and over the tree-tops came the silver streaks in the clouds which herald the approach of dawn. They knew that their remaining time must now be short, and for a while they spoke no words. Still they sat side by side upon the bench, Maurice holding Gabrielle's hand folded within his own. Motionless, and with her head leaning forward, she wept in silence, tears of mingled joy and anguish. Maurice felt a strange thrill of rapture in his heart as he gazed in the sweet face of his beautiful betrothed, illumined by the soft rays of the moon, and as if seized with a sudden impulse, he fell upon his knees before her.

"Do you love me, dearest?" he murmured, in trembling accents.

"God is my witness," she answered, gently, "that I love you better than aught else on earth."

As if startled by the danger of discovery, to which they were becoming every instant more and more ex-

posed, the young man sprang hastily to his feet, clasped her in his arms, and kissed her passionately.

"Farewell, my own true love," he said, softly. "Farewell until we meet again."

"Must you, then, leave me?"

"Alas, yes!"

She feared that her own gentleness and calmness at the supreme moment of parting would seem cold and tame in contrast with his exaltation, and, throwing her arms around his neck, she cried:—

"Kiss me once more, Maurice; once more!"

Again he pressed his burning lips to hers in one long, last embrace.

"Farewell, Maurice," she sighed. "I feel that, if I were in my shroud, your kiss would recall me back to life!"

And with these prophetic words ringing strangely in his ears, he turned, and fled from her presence.

III.

FOUR long and eventful years had passed since the lovers' clandestine parting, when Captain de Serres again set foot on the soil of his native land. The transport which brought a portion of his regiment home entered the harbour of Brest early one bright morning in June, and Maurice the same day set out for Paris, his first thought being to embrace his widowed mother, whom he idolized. He had taken the precaution to send her previous intelligence of his return to France, and of his safety, for the poor lady, during nearly two years, had mourned her only son as dead. Of his betrothal to Mademoiselle de Launay she had never known, though she knew of the President by name as one of her late husband's early friends.

When Maurice arrived in Paris, on the second morning after his departure from Brest, and it was vouchsafed to his mother to clasp in her arms the son she had thought gone from her for ever, her joy can only be pictured by those to whom it has been given to taste an unhopd-for happiness. Maurice, too, was happy; but still, after the first emotions of such a meeting, Madame de Serres' keenly observant glance detected in her son's face a strange expression of melancholy, and an air of abstraction in his replies to her anxious questions, which at once aroused all her solicitude. Alarmed at his singular demeanour, she tenderly pressed him to confide to her the cause of his sadness, that she might at least attempt to soothe and console him.

"It is nothing, mother," he said, with an effort to smile, "merely a childish folly, of which a man should be ashamed; but since you imagine that there is some serious cause for my ill-timed depression, I must do my best to reassure you, though I fear you will only laugh at me."

"No, no, my son, I shall not laugh, whatever it may be," replied Madame de Serres. "Explain yourself fully, Maurice, and trust my good sense to make all due allowances."



"FAREWELL."

"Very well, mother," was the answer, "you shall know the exact truth. On my way home this morning, I passed before the Church of St. Roch, the entire front of which was heavily hung with black, and decorated for the funeral of some person of note. Such a circumstance, I am aware, is of every-day occurrence in Paris, and would not likely attract the attention of an indifferent passer-by. But upon me the sight of those mournful preparations had a strange and mystic effect, which seemed to chill my blood, and imbued me with a presentiment of evil. I feared—ah! you are smiling at my superstitious weakness, and you are right. But three years of captivity and horrible sufferings have so unstrung me that my restoration to liberty and home seems a miraculous dream, and I tremble to awake, lest I should indeed find it to be only a vision after all."

"My dear Maurice," said his mother, imprinting a kiss on his brow, "let this convince you that it is no dream. The feelings you have described to me I can well understand, and they prove that you cling strongly to your recovered happiness, since you tremble lest it may again be snatched from you by relentless destiny. You must try to forget the trials of the past, and accustom yourself to the present, as if you had never known what it is to suffer. As for your mournful impression at the sight of a church hung with black, you have been so long absent from France that a very ordinary occurrence seems invested with a significance it really does not possess, except for those who have sustained the loss of a dear relative or friend. The funeral decorations you saw this morning were, no doubt, in honour of the young and beautiful Madame du Bourg, wife of the President du Bourg, chief judge of the Civil Tribunal of Paris."

"The beautiful Madame du Bourg?" repeated the young officer, inquiringly. "Was the fame of her beauty, then, so universal as to become proverbial?"

"Yes, poor young creature," replied Madame de Serres, "though she had only resided in Paris since her union with the President du Bourg, about eighteen months ago. Her husband was nearly thirty years her senior, and the unhappy lady died after an illness of only two days—so I was informed yesterday—leaving an infant six months old. The unfortunate lady herself was scarcely more than a child, and before her marriage was the belle of Toulouse, Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Launay."

This disclosure so simple and so brusque, of a terrible calamity to him, did not at once penetrate sharply and clearly the mind of Maurice de Serres. He was so utterly unprepared for the blow that for a moment he was unable to realize the disastrous news thus unconsciously imparted to him by his mother. He gazed at her with the air of a man who had not fully grasped the meaning of the words she had spoken, and asked her to repeat them. Then Madame de Serres, remembering that her son had been stationed at Toulouse a few years previously, and might consequently have met the President de Launay and his daughter, framed an evasive reply; but the instant she again named Mademoiselle de Launay, and reverted to the story of her sudden death, Maurice fell, with a cry of anguish, at his mother's feet, as though struck by a mortal wound—a livid pallor overspread his features, his breathing was that of a man struggling against suffocation, and he might have died, had not a flood of tears come to his relief.

In this critical emergency Madame de Serres fortunately retained her presence of mind, and with the ingenuity of maternal instinct, she found means to alleviate the violent grief of her son. With his head pillowed upon her bosom, she talked to him of his lost bride, divining all that had occurred without a word of explanation from Maurice, and gently reproaching him for having failed to tell her, his mother, the story of his love. She found means to reconcile him to the death of Gabrielle—that, he said, was the will of God—but how could he ever forget the broken vow, or forgive the perfidy of her who had called Heaven to witness her promise of



"DISASTROUS NEWS."

fidelity? Then, with admirable tact and delicacy, his mother recalled to his mind his capture by the enemy, and the official report of his death, which, no doubt, had reached Toulouse, and had left Mademoiselle de Launay no resource but resignation to the decree of Providence. Probably, she said, after a long resistance and many tears, the unhappy girl had at last yielded an unwilling obedience to her father's commands, and had consented to a marriage of convenience, in which her affections had borne no part. And so natural and plausible was this theory, that in devising these simple motives in mitigation of Gabrielle's conduct, Madame de Serres told her son the exact truth. Finally, she poured balm into his heart by asking him to consider whether the real cause of Mademoiselle de Launay's early death might not have been sorrow for Maurice's loss, and the bitter wretchedness of her forced marriage with a husband whom she could never love.

These wise arguments were, indeed, not without soothing effect. At all events, after listening to his mother's words for some time, he became more calm, though a keen observer would have divined that his silence was not that of resignation, but the refuge of a mind which conceives a desperate project, weighs its possibility, and resolves upon carrying it into immediate execution. Madame de Serres watched with deep anxiety the expression of her son's face, and, had he once raised his eyes despairingly to hers, she might have read in them a determination to put an end to his life. But she never suspected him of harbouring any design so terrible, and when he entreated that he might be left alone, she acquiesced without hesitation.

Towards nightfall she had the satisfaction of seeing him rejoin her, apparently almost restored to tranquillity. In her presence, and without disguise or concealment, he provided himself with a considerable sum in gold, kissed her, and left the house without uttering a word, nor did Madame de Serres ask for an explanation, or seek to detain him. It was quite dark when Maurice sallied forth into the street, and walked rapidly in the direction of the Rue St. Honoré. On reaching the Church of St.

Roch, he lost no time in finding the sacristan, and inquired the name of the place where Madame du Bourg had been buried that morning. The information was supplied to him without hesitation, and he set off immediately for the designated cemetery. On arriving at the gates, he found them closed for the night, and experienced some difficulty in rousing the janitor, who was asleep in his lodge. After some demur, the man opened the door to his nocturnal visitor, and inquired his business.

"Let me come in," said Captain de Serres, "and I will tell you."

Seeing before him a young man of aristocratic mien and appearance, the grave-digger, whose curiosity was now fairly aroused, offered no further objection, and showed the way to a little room on the ground floor of the lodge.

"Be seated, sir," he said, civilly, placing a chair.

"You are, perhaps, fatigued with your walk?"

"No," replied the young officer; "there is no time to be lost."

Then, to the terror and amazement of the grave-digger, Maurice, placing in his trembling hands more

"Come!" said the grave-digger; "if it must be so, follow me!"

He led the way to the dark and silent cemetery, armed with a spade and coil of rope, and a thick chisel, Maurice carrying his companion's lantern. Stumbling over many a mound of earth, they at last reached the grave in which the dead woman had been buried only a few hours previously. Taking off his jacket, the grave-digger set to work, without uttering a single syllable. In an hour, which to Maurice seemed years of torture, the hollow sound of the spade striking the top of the coffin told them that their sacrilegious task was nearly accomplished. A few moments more, and the united efforts of the two men had succeeded in raising the coffin to the surface. Maurice whispered to the man to remove the lid without noise, but as may well be imagined, such an injunction was needless. Proceeding with the utmost silence and precaution, the grave-digger was not long in loosening the fastenings of the coffin. Then, having now recovered his customary coolness and self-command, he sat down quietly upon a neighbouring tombstone, and mutely motioned to Maurice, who stood gazing at the corpse, as if petrified by the horrible sight.

Finding the young man still remained immovable, the grave-digger pointed with his long, bony finger to the still, white object, and muttered, "Look, 'tis she!"

But Maurice made no response, and appeared no longer to remember why he was there, nor the crime he had instigated. He heard not the words of his companion, his gaze was fixed upon vacancy, the breath seemed to leave him, and he would have fallen to the ground had not the other, alarmed at this strange lethargy, seized the young man's arm, and again whispered "Look!" Then slowly lifting the shroud from the face of the corpse, he added, "Convince yourself. Is it this lady?"

At this instant the moon burst forth from behind the clouds, and its pale, mysterious light fell full upon the lineaments of her whom Maurice had idolized, and for whose sake he had committed this horrible deed. Her features bore still the sad, sweet expression he knew so well; the colour of her cheeks had lost little of its rosy tint, and though her eyes were closed, her lips were half parted, as if about to speak.

Flinging himself upon his knees beside the body, Maurice wept tears which brought his anguish some relief. With passionate sobs he recalled the story of their love, of their young hopes, of their betrothal, and of their sudden and piteous separation, and he bitterly reproached himself for having yielded obedience to her father's commands, and left her to be sacrificed a victim to that father's unbending will.

As he spoke he gently raised her in his arms and looked closely in her face. At that instant memory brought back to him her parting words, years before, when, as they said farewell, he had pressed his lips to hers. The scene flashed across his brain with the rapidity of lightning, and, as if urged by some sudden inspiration, he stooped and kissed her, as he had kissed her on that too well remembered night.

No sooner had his lips touched hers than he uttered a terrible cry, and rose to his feet, trembling convulsively. Then, with a wild laugh, he seized the body, and before the astonished grave-digger could interpose, the young officer fled from the spot with his burden in his arms, springing over the graves, and threading his rapid course among the tombs, as if the weight he bore were no more encumbrance to his flight than a flake of falling snow.



"MAURICE AND THE GRAVE-DIGGER."

gold than he had ever before seen in his whole life, implored him to accept it as a reward for committing an act of sacrilege—a crime then punishable with death. Maurice entreated him to remove the earth from the grave he had filled that day, to exhume the corpse of Madame du Bourg, and to break open the coffin which covered the remains of that most unhappy lady, that he, Maurice de Serres, her affianced husband, might look once again upon the woman he had so passionately loved.

Then ensued a long and painful discussion, for the glittering heap of gold, pressed upon the poor man by his tempter, did not succeed in overcoming either the fears or the scruples of the honest grave-digger. To the distracted young officer it was a maddening blow to find that the cupidity upon which he had counted to vanquish the obstacles in his way had no existence, or if it had, was less powerful than the grave-digger's dread of the consequences. Maurice gave full vent to his despair, and his tears so moved the heart of the poor man, at whose feet he grovelled in agony, that out of the commiseration he succeeded in inspiring came a consent which neither gold nor entreaties had been able to obtain.



"WITH A WILD LAUGH HE SEIZED THE BODY."

With almost supernatural force and rapidity the madman, as the amazed and bewildered grave-digger now felt assured he was, made good his escape, like a tiger carrying off his prey.

Seeing that pursuit was useless—even if he had contemplated such a course—the poor man hastened to remove the evidence of the sacrilege in which he had played so prominent a part. Lowering the empty coffin into the open grave, he rapidly threw in the earth, and in a short time the spot showed no trace of having been disturbed since the interment of the preceding morning. Then the grave-digger gathered together the implements of his trade and stole back to his lodge, muttering imprecations upon his mad visitor, and upon himself for having assisted in committing a crime fraught with such formidable danger to its perpetrators, should the horrible deed ever be brought to light.

IV.

NEARLY five years had passed away since that eventful night, and, during that long period, nothing had occurred to revive the fears of the conscience-stricken grave-digger, or to give rise to his misgivings that the theft of Madame du Bourg's corpse might by some means be discovered. In fact, after carefully weighing all the circumstances, he had finally come to the conclusion that he had been the victim of a conspiracy hatched by medical students, one having played the principal part in the abominable transaction, and the other or others waiting outside the cemetery to assist in making off with the "subject," should the nefarious plot succeed. The students (if this

hypothesis were correct) would never betray the secret, for obvious reasons; and so long a time having now elapsed since the burial of the unhappy lady, the contingency of an authorized exhumation for any cause whatever became daily more and more remote.

On All Souls' Day the bereaved husband came regularly each year to pray at his dead wife's tomb, and each year the grave-digger observed him with feelings of remorse, as if it were adding to his weight of guilt in standing near while the worthy President du Bourg knelt reverently beside the mound, beneath which was buried only an empty coffin. The sight of this futile annual pilgrimage possessed for the repentant grave-digger a fascination impossible to resist, and amongst all the mourners who visited the cemetery on that solemn day, he took note of none save M. du Bourg, before whom he more than once felt tempted to throw himself and confess all.

When the anniversary came round again, the grave-digger stationed himself at his usual post of observation, and saw the President draw near to his wife's tomb, over which he immediately bent in prayer. Both he and the contrite grave-digger were so deeply absorbed in thought that they did not notice the approach of a woman, who uttered a suppressed cry as she caught sight of the recumbent figure. Turning involuntarily and looking quickly up, M. du Bourg instantly recognised, in the person who had interrupted his meditations, no other than the wife whose death he had mourned so long. The grave-digger also remembered well the pale, beautiful face, from which he had removed the shroud five years before, and he instantly fell to the ground insensible. But before the startled husband could recover from

his amazement, Gabrielle, for it was she, swept past him like the wind and was gone. Following her retreating form in the distance, the President reached the cemetery gates in time to see her leap into a carriage with emblazoned panels, which, before he could reach the spot, was driven rapidly away towards the centre of Paris. M. du Bourg then returned to the place where he had seen the grave-digger fall in a swoon, hoping to derive some information from the stranger who had been thus terror-struck at sight of the unexpected apparition, but the man had been already carried to his lodge, and died an hour afterwards without recovering consciousness.

Losing no time, the President addressed himself to the Lieutenant-General of Police, by whom inquiries were set on foot without delay, and it was speedily established that the carriage, which many persons had observed in waiting at the cemetery gates, bore the arms of the noble house of De Serres. As M. du Bourg was aware of his late wife's early attachment to the young officer whose death abroad had been officially reported a few months previous to her marriage, the motive of her disappearance, if she were still alive, was clearly explained. But the mystery of her existence five years after her supposed death and burial must now be immediately unravelled.

By order of the authorities, the grave in which Madame du Bourg had been interred was opened, and the empty, broken coffin was found. This discovery fully confirmed the suspicions of the President du Bourg, and prompted him in the course he now resolved to pursue.

V.

MEANWHILE, Madame Julie de Serres, the young and lovely wife whom Captain Maurice de Serres had married abroad five years previously, and now brought to Paris for the first time, returned that day to her husband's house in a state of the utmost alarm and agitation. Pale and trembling, she begged to be conducted to Maurice, and the pair remained closeted together for several hours. At last, in outward semblance perfectly calm, she re-joined the Countess, her husband's mother, and from that day resumed the ordinary current of life as though nothing had arisen to mar its serenity.

About a fortnight had elapsed since the occurrences above related, and the incident in the cemetery appeared to have been forgotten, or if remembered by the chance witnesses of the scene, it was generally supposed that the mysterious lady who had been seen by M. du Bourg merely bore a fortuitous resemblance to the President's deceased wife. But during these few days, aided by all the power in the hands of the Lieutenant-General of Police, M. du Bourg instituted a searching and systematic investigation, firmly resolved as he was to know the truth. Without in the least suspecting that their every movement was watched, Captain de Serres and his wife

were surrounded with spies, who rendered a daily report of their minutest actions. Maurice having come to the conclusion that it would be imprudent to leave Paris, there was no difficulty in keeping him under constant observation. Setting to work like an experienced lawyer, M. du Bourg rapidly collected evidence of the greatest importance. Through the Minister of War, he ascertained the exact date of Captain de Serres' return to France, after his captivity and supposed death in the Indies. At the passport office he found out the day of the young officer's departure shortly after his arrival in Paris. The postilions whom he had employed on his journey to Havre were discovered and interrogated. From them it was elicited that the traveller had been accompanied to the coast by a lady closely veiled, who never left the carriage until the pair reached their destination. The name of the vessel in which M. de Serres and a lady inscribed as his cousin had taken passage to South America was ferreted out, and the ship's journal was brought to Paris.

Armed with these formidable proofs, the President du Bourg demanded from the High Court of Paris the dissolution of the illegal marriage between Captain Maurice de Serres and the pretended Julie de Serres, who, as M. du Bourg solemnly declared, was Gabrielle du Bourg, his lawful wife.

The extraordinary novelty of this case created an immense sensation throughout Europe, and pamphlets were exchanged by the faculty, some maintaining that a prolonged trance had given rise to the belief in the apparent death of Madame du Bourg, whilst others as stoutly affirmed that resuscitation under such

circumstances was an absolute impossibility. This latter theory secured the majority of partisans amongst medical men, and after calculating the number of hours which it was stated that Madame du Bourg had continued to exist in her grave, the fact was conclusively established that no case of a similar lethargy had ever previously been recorded. M. de Serres himself expressed the most profound and unaffected pity for his

adversary, and acknowledged that when he had first met the lady who now bore his name, her marvellous likeness to Gabrielle de Launay had struck him with awe and amazement. This declaration was made with such evident sincerity that it carried conviction to the minds of all who heard it, and few doubted but that the President du Bourg had either lost his reason or was the instigator of a corrupt and knavish conspiracy.

VI.

IN due course, the hearing of this extraordinary suit came before the High Tribunal of Paris, and Madame Julie de Serres was summoned to appear in court, and answer the questions of the judges. She was confronted with M. du Bourg, and was surprised and indignant

at his pretensions. The father of Gabrielle de Launay came from Toulouse, and burst into tears at the sight of one who bore so wondrous a resemblance to his dead daughter; nor could he find words in which to address the lady who seemed the living image of his only child, and who calmly denied all knowledge of him. The judges, in much perplexity, looked at each other in troubled silence and indecision. Madame de Serres, in simple language, told the story of her entire life. She was an orphan, she said, born in South America, of a French father and a Spanish mother, and had never left her native country until her marriage. The legal certificate was produced, attesting the marriage of Maurice de Serres and Julie de Nerval, and, with other formal documents, was laid before the Court. After hearing the pleas of the distinguished advocates engaged on both sides, the judges consulted together for a short time, and announced that their decision would be given at the next sitting of the tribunal.

On the following day the court was crowded to excess, and it was rumoured amongst the many ladies and gentlemen of position who were present that a majority of the judges were so thoroughly convinced of the preposterous character of the President du Bourg's claim, as to render certain a decree in favour of Captain de Serres and his wife. Amidst a sympathetic silence—for popular opinion was almost unanimously enlisted on the side of the defendants in this unprecedented case—the President of the High Court commenced in a grave voice the delivery of the judgment, when suddenly M. du Bourg, who had not been present at the commencement of that day's proceedings, entered the court, leading by the hand a



"SHE BEGGED TO BE CONDUCTED TO MAURICE."

little girl of five or six summers. At this moment Madame de Serres, her face lighted up with a smile of exultation, was seated by the side of her advocate, directly in front of the Bench, and in full view of the public. Conversing in animated tones with her counsel, she did not observe the entrance of M. du Bourg; but in a moment a tiny hand was placed in her own, and a child's soft voice said, timidly:—

"Mamma, won't you kiss me?"

woman to him by whose act, and by whose act alone, she lives. Her existence belongs to him, and you can only claim a corpse!"

Had the brilliant advocate been pleading the cause of a beautiful woman before a modern Parisian jury, he might have indulged some hope of success; but a hundred and fifty years ago the law of France was not swayed by sentiment. The judges were unmoved by this vehement outburst, and prepared to alter their decree in conformity



"MAMMA, WON'T YOU KISS ME?"

Madame de Serres turned quickly, uttered a sharp cry, and, clasping the child in her arms, covered it with tears and caresses. The daughter and wife had complete control over the emotions of Nature, but the mother's heart had not the strength to resist the sudden strain.

From that moment the case before the Court, and still undecided, assumed a totally different aspect. Springing to his feet in an instant, the advocate of the unhappy lady unhesitatingly proclaimed the identity of his client, and now called upon the judges to annul her marriage with M. du Bourg, which had been dissolved, he declared solemnly, by the hand of Death. Turning towards M. du Bourg, he exclaimed, with fiery eloquence:—

"Sir, you have no right to demand from the earth the body you have consigned to the grave. Leave this

with the facts elicited through the presence of the child. The wretched wife and mother then entreated permission to spend the remainder of her days in the seclusion of a convent. This, too, was refused, and she was formally condemned to return to the house of her first husband. Two days after this judgment had been rendered, she obeyed. The gates swung wide open before her, and, dressed in white, pale and weeping, she entered the great hall, where the President du Bourg, surrounded by his entire household, stood awaiting her arrival.

Approaching him, and pressing a phial to her lips, she gasped forth the words, "I restore to you what you lost!"—and fell dead at his feet, poisoned.

The same night, despite his devoted mother's efforts to save him, Captain de Serres died by his own hand.



A Thing that Glistened.

By Frank R. Stockton.

IN the fall of 1888, the steamship *Sunda*, from Southampton, was running along the southern coast of Long Island, not many hours from port, when she was passed by one of the great British liners outward bound. The tide was high, and the course of both vessels was nearer the coast than is usual, that of the *Sunda* being inside of the other.

As the two steamers passed each other there was a great waving of hats and handkerchiefs. Suddenly there was a scream from the *Sunda*. It came from Signora Rochita, the *prima donna* of an opera troupe which was coming to America in that ship.

"I have lost my bracelet!" she cried in Italian, and then, turning to the passengers, she repeated the cry in very good English.

The situation was instantly comprehended by everyone. It was late in the afternoon; the captain had given a grand dinner to the passengers, at which the *prima donna* had appeared in all her glories of ornamentation, and the greatest of these glories—a magnificent diamond bracelet—was gone from the arm with which she had been enthusiastically waving her lace handkerchief.

The second officer, who was standing near, dashed into the captain's office, and quickly reappeared with chart and instruments, and made a rapid calculation of the position of the vessel at the time of the accident, making due allowance for the few minutes that had passed since the first cry of the signora. After consultation with the captain and re-calculations of the distance from land and some other points, he announced to the weeping signora that her bracelet lay under a little black spot he made on the chart, and that if she chose to send a diver for it she might get it, for the depth of water at that place was not great.

By profession I am a diver, and the next day I was engaged to search for the diamond bracelet of Signora Rochita. I had a copy of the chart, and having hired a small schooner, with several men who had been my assistants before, and taking with me all the necessary accoutrements and appliances, I set out for the spot indicated, and by afternoon we were anchored, we believed, at it or very near it.

I lost no time in descending. I wore, of course, the usual diver's suit, but I took with me no tools nor any of the implements used by divers when examining wrecks; but

I carried in my right hand a brilliant electric lamp, connected with a powerful battery on the schooner. I held this by an insulated handle in which there were two little knobs, by which I could light or extinguish it.

The bottom was hard and smooth, and lighting my lamp, I began to look about me. If I approached the bracelet I ought to be able to see it sparkle; but after wandering over considerable space, I saw no sparkles nor anything like a bracelet. Suddenly, however, I saw something which greatly interested me. It was a hole in the bottom of the ocean, almost circular, and at the least ten feet in diameter. I was surprised that I had not noticed it before, for it lay not far from the stern of our vessel.

Standing near the rocky edge of the aperture, I held up my lamp and looked down. Not far below I saw the glimmering of what seemed to be the bottom of this subterranean well. I was seized with a desire to explore this great hole running down under the ordinary bottom of the sea. I signalled to be lowered, and although my comrades were much surprised at such an order, they obeyed, and down I went into the well. The sides of this seemed rocky and almost perpendicular, but

after descending about fifteen feet, they receded on every side, and I found myself going down into a wide cavern, the floor of which I touched in a very short time.

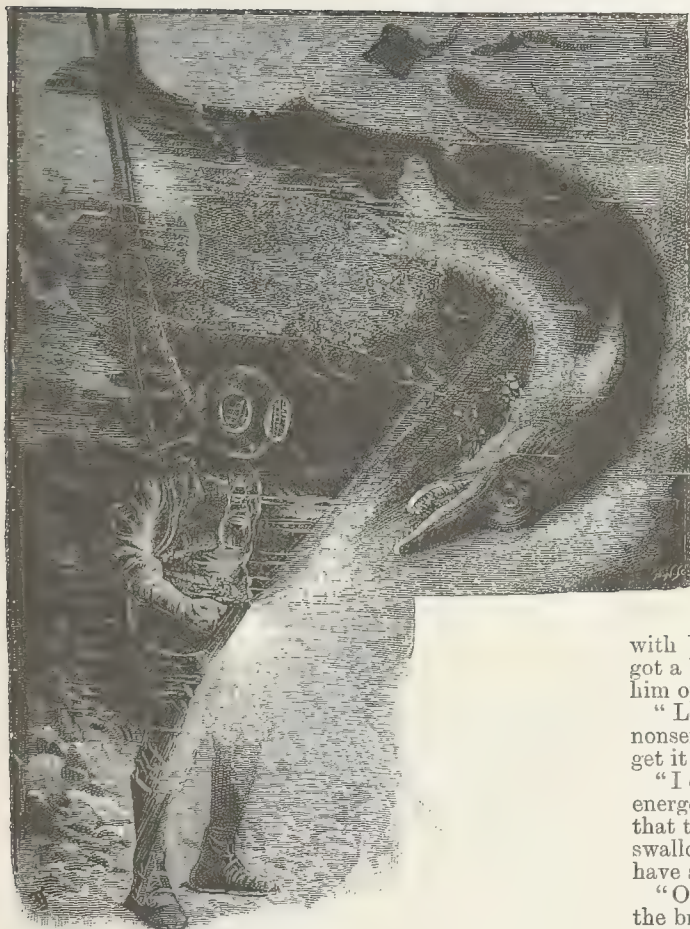
Holding up my lamp, and looking about me, I found myself in a sea cave of some thirty feet in diameter, with a dome-like roof, in which, a little to one side of the centre, was the lower opening of the well. I became very much excited; this was just the sort of place into which a bracelet or anything else of value might be expected to have the bad luck to drop. I walked about and gazed everywhere, but I found nothing but rocks and water.

I was about to signal to be drawn up, when above me I saw what appeared to be a flash of darkness coming down through the well. With a rush and a swirl it entered the cavern, and in a moment I recognised

the fact that a great fish was swooping around and about me. Its movements were so rapid and irregular, now circling along the outer edge of the floor of the cavern, then mounting above me until its back seemed to scrape the roof, that I could not form a correct idea of the size of the creature. It seemed to me to be at least twenty feet long. I stood almost stupefied, keeping



"WAVING HER LACE HANDKERCHIEF."



"I STOOD STUPEFIED"

my eyes as far as possible fixed upon the swiftly moving monster.

Sometimes he came quite near me, when I shuddered in every fibre, and then he shot away, but ever gliding with powerful undulations of his body and tail, around, about, and above me. I did not dare to signal to be drawn up, for fear that the terrible creature would enter the well-hole with me. Then he would probably touch me, perhaps crush me against the wall; but my mind was capable of forming no plans; I only hoped the fish would ascend and disappear by the way he came.

My mind was not in its strongest condition, being much upset by a great trouble, and I was so frightened that I really did not know what I ought to do, but I had sense enough left to feel sure that the fish had been attracted into the cavern by my lamp. Obviously the right thing to do was to extinguish it, but the very thought of this nearly drove me into a frenzy. I could not endure to be left alone with the shark in darkness and water. It was an insane idea, but I felt that, whatever happened, I must keep my eyes upon him.

Now the great fish began to swoop nearer and nearer to me, and then suddenly changing its tactics, it receded to the most distant wall of the cavern, where, with its head toward me, it remained for the first time motionless. But this did not continue long. Gently turning over on its side, it opened its great mouth, and in an instant, with a rush, it came directly at me. My light shone full into its vast mouth, glistening with teeth: there was a violent jerk which nearly threw me off my feet, and all was blackness. The shark had swallowed my lamp! By rare good fortune he did not take my hand also.

Now I frantically tugged at my signal-rope. Without

my lamp, I had no thought but a desire to be pulled out of the water, no matter what happened. In a few minutes I sat, divested of my diving suit, and almost insensible, upon the deck of the schooner. As soon as I was able to talk I told my astonished comrades what had happened, and while we were discussing this strange occurrence, one of them, looking over the side, saw, slowly rising to the surface, the body of a dead shark.

"By George!" he cried, "here is the beast! He has been killed by the current from the battery." We all crowded to the rail, and looked down upon the monster. He was about ten feet long, and it was plain that he had died through making himself the connection between the poles of the battery.

"Well," said the captain, presently, "I suppose you are not going down again?"

"Not I," I replied; "I give up this job."

Then suddenly I cried, "Come, boys, all of you, make fast to that shark, and get him on board; I want him."

Some of the men laughed, but my manner was so earnest, that in a moment they all set about to help me. A small boat was lowered, lines were made fast to the dead fish, and, with block and tackle, we hauled him on deck. I then got a butcher's knife from the cabin, and began to cut him open.

"Look here, Tom!" exclaimed the captain, "that's nonsense. Your lamp's all smashed to pieces, and if you get it out, it will never be any good to you."

"I don't care for the lamp," I answered, working away energetically, "but an idea has struck me. It's plain that this creature had a fancy for shining things. If he swallowed a lamp, there is no reason why he should not have swallowed anything else that glistened."

"Oh-o!" cried the captain, "you think he swallowed the bracelet, do you?"

And instantly everybody crowded more closely about me.

I got out the lamp—its wires were severed as smoothly as if they had been cut with shears; then I worked on. Suddenly there was a cry from every man. Something glimmered in the dark interior of the fish. I grasped it and drew it out. It was not a bracelet, but a pint bottle, which glimmered like a glow-worm. With the bottle in my hand I sat upon the deck and gazed at it. I shook it; it shone brighter. A bit of oiled silk was tied tightly over the cork, and it was plain to see that it was partly filled with a light-coloured oil, into which a bit of phosphorus had been dropped, which on being agitated filled the bottle with a dim light.

But there was something more in the bottle than phosphorus and oil. I saw a tin tube corked at each end; the exposed parts of the corks spreading enough to prevent the tin from striking the glass. We all knew that this was one of those bottles containing a communication of some sort, which are often thrown into the sea, and float about until they are picked up. The addition of the oil and phosphorus was intended to make it visible by night as well as by day, and this was plainly the reason why it had been swallowed by a light-loving shark.

I poured out the oil and extracted the tube. Wiping it carefully I drew out the corks, and then, from the little tin cylinder, I pulled out a half-sheet of note-paper, rolled up tightly. I unrolled it and read these words:—

"Before I jump overboard, I want to let people know that I killed John Polhemus. So I have fixed up this bottle. I hope it may be picked up in time to keep Jim Barker from being hung. I did think of leaving it on the steamer, but I might change my mind about jumping overboard, and I guess this is the best way. The clothes I wore, and the hatchet I did it with, are under the woodshed back of Polhemus's house.—HENRY RAMSEY."

I sprang to my feet with a yell. Jim Barker was my



"IT WAS A PINT BOTTLE."

brother, now lying in prison under sentence of death for the murder of Polhemus. All the circumstantial evidence, and there was no other, had been against him. The note was dated eight months back. Oh! cruel fool of a murderer. The shark was thrown overboard, and we made best speed to port; and, before the end of the afternoon, I had put Ramsey's note into the hands of the lawyer who had charge of my brother's case.

Fortunately, he was able to identify the handwriting and signature of Ramsey, a man who had been suspected of the crime, but against whom no evidence could be found. The lawyer was almost as excited as I was by the contents of this note, and early the next morning we started together for the house of the Polhemus's family. There under the wood-shed we found, carefully buried, a blood-stained shirt and vest and the hatchet.

My impulse was to fly to my brother, but this my lawyer forbade. He would take charge of the affair, and no false hopes must be excited, but he confidently assured me that my brother was as good as free.

Returning to the city, I thought I might as well make my report to Signora Rochita. The lady was at home and saw me. She showed the most intense interest in what I told her, and insisted upon every detail of my experiences. As I spoke of the shark and the subterranean cave she nearly fainted from excitement, and her maid had to bring the smelling salts. When I had finished she looked at me steadily for a moment, and then said:—

"I have something to tell you, but I hardly know how to say it. I never lost my bracelet. I intended to wear it at the captain's dinner; but when I went to put it on I found the clasp was broken, and, as I was late, I hurried to the table without the bracelet, and thought of it no more until, when we were all waving and cheering, I glanced at my wrist and found it was not there. Then, utterly forgetting that I had not put it on, I thought it had gone into the sea. It was only this morning that, opening what I supposed was the empty box, I saw it. Here it is."

I never saw such gorgeous jewels.

"Madam," said I, "I am glad you thought you lost it, for I have gained something better than all these."

"You are a good man," said she, and then she paid me liberally for my services. When this business had been finished, she asked:—

"Are you married?"

I answered that I was not.

"Is there anyone you intend to marry?"

"Yes," said I.

"What is her name?" she asked.

"Sarah Jane McElroy."

"Wait a minute," said she, and she retired into another room. Presently she returned and handed me a little box.

"Give this to your lady-love," said she; "when she looks at it she will never forget that you are a brave man."

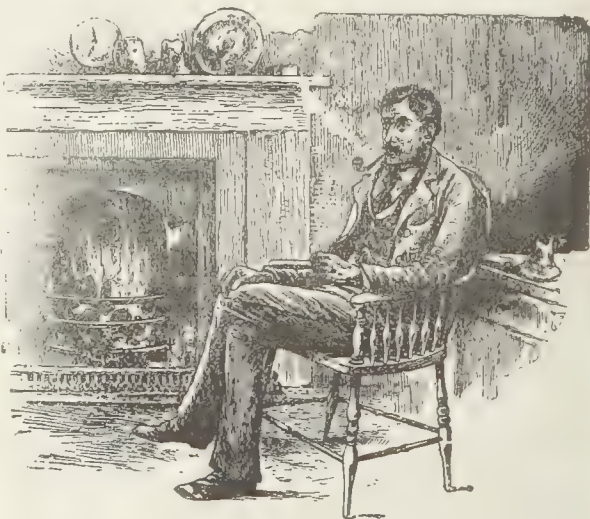
When Sarah Jane opened the box, there was a little pin with a diamond head, and she gave a scream of delight. But I saw no reason for jumping or crying out, for, after having seen the Signora's bracelet, this stone seemed like a pea in a bushel of potatoes.

"I don't need anything," she said, "to remind me you are a

brave man. I am going to buy furniture with it."

I laughed, and remarked that "every little helps."

When I sit, with my wife by my side, before the fire in our comfortable home, and consider that the parlour carpet, and the furniture, and the pictures, and the hall and stair carpet, and all the dining-room furniture, with the china and the glass and the linen, and all the kitchen utensils, and two bedroom suites on the second story—both hard wood—and all the furniture and fittings of a very pleasant room for a single man, the third story front, were bought with the pin that the Signora gave to Sarah Jane, I am filled with profound respect for things that glitter. And when I look on the other side of the fire and see Jim smoking his pipe just as happy as anybody, then I say to myself that, if there are people who think that this story is too much out of the common, I wish they would step in here and talk to Jim about it. There is a fire in his eye when he tells you how glad he is that it was the shark that died instead of him.



The Pistol Shot.

From the Russian of Alexander Pushkin.

I.

WE were stationed at the little village of Z—. The life of an officer in the army is well known. Drill and the riding-school in the morning; dinner with the colonel or at the Jewish restaurant; and in the evening punch and cards.

At Z— nobody kept open house, and there was no girl that anyone could think of marrying. We used to meet at each other's rooms, where we never saw anything but one another's uniforms. There was only one man among us who did not belong to the regiment. He was about thirty-five, and, of course, we looked upon him as an old fellow. He had the advantage of experience, and his habitual gloom, stern features, and his sharp tongue gave him great influence over his juniors. He was surrounded by a certain mystery. His looks were Russian, but his name was foreign. He had served in the Hussars, and with credit. No one knew what had induced him to retire and settle in this out-of-the-way little village, where he lived in mingled poverty and extravagance. He always went on foot, and wore a shabby black coat. But he was always ready to receive any of our officers; and, though his dinners, cooked by a retired soldier, never consisted of more than two or three dishes, champagne flowed at them like water. His income or how he got it no one knew; and no one ventured to ask. He had a few books on military subjects and a few novels, which he willingly lent and never asked to have returned. But, on the other hand, he never returned the books he himself borrowed.

His principal recreation was pistol-shooting. The walls of his room were riddled with bullets—a perfect honey-comb. A rich collection of pistols was the only thing luxurious in his modestly-furnished villa. His skill as a shot was quite prodigious. If he had undertaken to shoot a pear off someone's cap, not a man in our regiment would have hesitated to act as target. Our conversation often turned on duelling, Silvio—so I will call him—never joined in it. When asked if he had ever fought, he answered curtly, "Yes." But he gave no particulars, and it was evident that he disliked such questions. We concluded that the memory of some unhappy victim of his terrible skill preyed heavily upon his conscience. None of us could ever have suspected him of cowardice. There are men whose look alone is enough to repel such a suspicion.

An unexpected incident fairly astonished us. One afternoon about ten officers were dining with Silvio. They drank as usual; that is to say, a great deal. After dinner we asked our host to make a pool. For a long time he refused on the ground that he seldom played. At last he ordered cards to be brought in. With half a hundred gold pieces on the table we

sat round him, and the game began. It was Silvio's habit not to speak when playing. He never disputed or explained. If an adversary made a mistake, Silvio without a word chalked it down against him. Knowing his way, we always let him have it.

But among us on this occasion was an officer who had but lately joined. While playing he absent-mindedly scored a point too much. Silvio took the chalk and corrected the score in his own fashion. The officer, supposing him to have made a mistake, began to explain. Silvio went on dealing in silence. The officer, losing patience, took the brush and rubbed out what he thought was wrong. Silvio took the chalk and re-corrected it. The officer, heated with wine and play, and irritated by the laughter of the company, thought himself aggrieved, and, in a fit of passion, seized a brass candlestick and threw it at Silvio, who only just managed to avoid the missile. Great was our confusion. Silvio got up, white with rage, and said, with sparkling eyes:—

"Sir! have the goodness to withdraw, and you may thank God that this has happened in my own house."

We could have no doubt as to the consequences, and we already looked upon our new comrade as a dead man. He withdrew, saying that he was ready to give satisfaction for his offence in any way desired.

The game went on for a few minutes. But feeling that our host was upset, we gradually left off playing and



"THE OFFICER SEIZED A BRASS CANDLESTICK."

dispersed, each to his own quarters. At the riding-school next day, we were already asking one another whether the young lieutenant was still alive, when he appeared among us. We asked him the same question, and were told that he had not yet heard from Silvio. We were astonished. We went to Silvio's and found him in the court-yard, popping bullet after bullet into an ace which he had gummed to the gate. He received us as usual, but made no allusion to what had happened on the previous evening.

Three days passed, and the lieutenant was still alive. "Can it be possible," we asked one another in astonishment, "that Silvio will not fight?"

Silvio did not fight. He accepted a flimsy apology, and became reconciled to the man who had insulted him. This lowered him greatly in the opinion of the young men, who, placing bravery above all the other human virtues, and regarding it as an excuse for every imaginable vice, were ready to overlook anything sooner than a lack of courage. However, little by little all was forgotten, and Silvio regained his former influence. I alone could not renew my friendship with him. Being naturally romantic, I had surpassed the rest in my attachment to the man whose life was an enigma, and who seemed to me a hero of some mysterious story. He liked me; and with me alone did he drop his sarcastic tone and converse simply and most agreeably on many subjects. But after this unlucky evening the thought that his honour was tarnished, and that it remained so by his own choice, never left me; and this prevented any renewal of our former intimacy. I was ashamed to look at him. Silvio was too sharp and experienced not to notice this and guess the reason. It seemed to vex him, for I observed that once or twice he hinted at an explanation. But I wanted none; and Silvio gave me up. Thenceforth I only met him in the presence of other friends, and our confidential talks were at an end.

The busy occupants of the capital have no idea of the emotions so frequently experienced by residents in the country and in country towns; as, for instance, in awaiting the arrival of the post. On Tuesdays and Fridays the bureau of the regimental staff was crammed with officers. Some were expecting money, others letters or newspapers. The letters were mostly opened on the spot, and the news freely interchanged, the office meanwhile presenting a most lively appearance.

Silvio's letters used to be addressed to our regiment, and he usually called for them himself. On one occasion, a letter having been handed to him, I saw him break the seal and, with a look of great impatience, read the contents. His eyes sparkled. The other officers, each engaged with his own letters, did not notice anything.

"Gentlemen," said Silvio, "circumstances demand my immediate departure. I leave to-night, and I hope you will not refuse to dine with me for the last time. I shall expect you, too," he added, turning towards me, "without fail." With these words he hurriedly left, and we agreed to meet at Silvio's.

I went to Silvio's at the appointed time, and found nearly the whole regiment with him. His things were already packed. Nothing remained but the bare, shot-marked walls. We sat down to table. The host was in excellent spirits, and his liveliness communicated itself to the rest of the company. Corks popped every moment. Bottles fizzed, and tumblers foamed incessantly, and we, with much warmth, wished our departing friend a pleasant journey and every happiness. The evening was far advanced when we rose from table. During the search for hats, Silvio wished everybody good-bye. Then, taking me by the hand, as I was on the point of leaving, he said in a low voice:—

"I want to speak to you."

I stopped behind.

The guests had gone and we were left alone.

Sitting down opposite one another, we lighted our pipes. Silvio was much agitated; no traces of his former gaiety remained. Deadly pale, with sparkling eyes, and a thick smoke issuing from his mouth, he

looked like a demon. Several minutes passed before he broke silence.

"Perhaps we shall never meet again," he said. "Before saying good-bye I want to have a few words with you. You may have remarked that I care little for the opinions of others. But I like you, and should be sorry to leave you under a wrong impression."

He paused and began refilling his pipe. I looked down and was silent.

"You thought it odd," he continued, "that I did not require satisfaction from that drunken maniac? You will grant, however, that, being entitled to the choice of weapons, I had his life more or less in my hands. I might attribute my tolerance to generosity, but I will not deceive you. If I could have chastised him without the least risk to myself, without the slightest danger to my own life, then I would on no account have forgiven him."

I looked at Silvio with surprise. Such a confession completely upset me. Silvio continued:—

"Precisely so: I had no right to endanger my life. Six years ago I received a slap in the face, and my enemy still lives."

My curiosity was greatly excited.

"Did you not fight him?" I inquired. "Circumstances probably separated you?"

"I did fight him," replied Silvio, "and here is a memento of our duel."

He rose and took from a cardboard box a red cap with a gold tassel and gold braid.

"My disposition is well known to you. I have been



"HERE IS A MEMENTO OF OUR DUEL."

accustomed to be first in everything. From my youth this has been my passion. In my time dissipation was the fashion, and I was the most dissipated man in the army. We used to boast of our drunkenness. I beat at drinking the celebrated Bourtoff, of whom Davidoff has sung in his poems. Duels in our regiment were of daily occurrence. I took part in all of them, either as second or as principal. My comrades adored me, while the commanders of the regiment, who were constantly being changed, looked upon me as an incurable evil.

"I was calmly, or rather boisterously, enjoying my

reputation, when a certain young man joined our regiment. He was rich, and came of a distinguished family—I will not name him. Never in my life did I meet with so brilliant, so fortunate a fellow!—young, clever, handsome, with the wildest spirits, the most reckless bravery, bearing a celebrated name, possessing funds of which he did not know the amount, but which were inexhaustible. You may imagine the effect he was sure to produce among us. My leadership was shaken. Dazzled by my reputation, he began by seeking my friendship. But I received him coldly; at which, without the least sign of regret, he kept aloof from me.

"I took a dislike to him. His success in the regiment and in the society of women brought me to despair. I tried to pick a quarrel with him. To my epigrams he replied with epigrams which always seemed to me more pointed and more piercing than my own, and which were certainly much livelier; for while he joked, I was raving.

"Finally, at a ball at the house of a Polish landed proprietor, seeing him receive marked attention from all the ladies, and especially from the lady of the house, who had formerly been on very friendly terms with me, I whispered some low insult in his ear. He flew into a passion, and gave me a slap on the cheek. We clutched our swords; the ladies fainted; we were separated; and the same night we drove out to fight.

"It was nearly daybreak. I was standing at the appointed spot with my three seconds. How impatiently I awaited my opponent! The spring sun had risen, and it was growing hot. At last I saw him in the distance. He was on foot, accompanied by only one second. We advanced to meet him. He approached, holding in his hand his regimental cap, filled full of black cherries.

"The seconds measured twelve paces. It was for me to fire first. But my excitement was so great that I could not depend upon the certainty of my hand; and, in order to give myself time to get calm, I ceded the first shot to my adversary. He would not accept it, and we decided to cast lots.

"The number fell to him; constant favourite of Fortune that he was! He aimed, and put a bullet through my cap.

"It was now my turn. His life at last was in my hands; I looked at him eagerly, trying to detect if only some faint shadow of uneasiness. But he stood beneath my pistol, picking out ripe cherries from his cap and spitting out the stones, some of which fell near me. His indifference enraged me. 'What is the use,' thought I, 'of depriving him of life, when he sets no value upon it?'

As this savage thought flitted through my brain I lowered the pistol.

"'You don't seem to be ready for death,' I said; 'you are eating your breakfast, and I don't want to interfere with you.'

"'You don't interfere with me in the least,' he replied. 'Be good enough to fire. Or don't fire if you prefer it: the shot remains with you, and I shall be at your service at any moment.'

"I turned to the seconds, informing them that I had no intention of firing that day; and with this the duel ended. I resigned my commission and retired to this little place. Since then not a single day has passed that I have not thought of my revenge; and now the hour has arrived."

Silvio took from his pocket the letter he had received that morning, and handed it to me to read. Someone

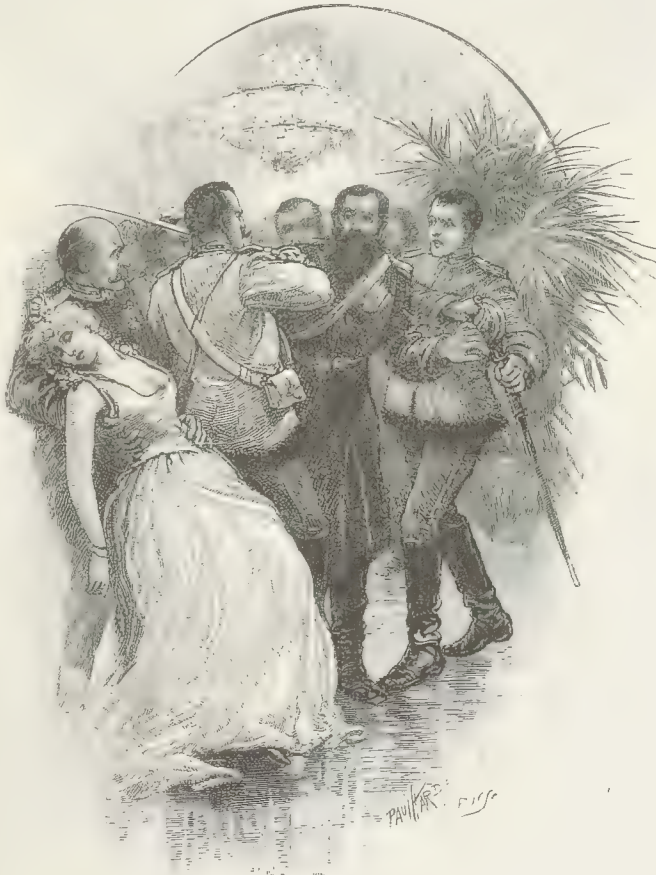
(it seemed to be his business agent) wrote to him from Moscow, that a certain individual was soon to be married to a young and beautiful girl.

"You guess," said Silvio, "who the certain individual is. I am starting for Moscow. We shall see whether he will be as indifferent now as he was some time ago, when in presence of death he ate cherries!"

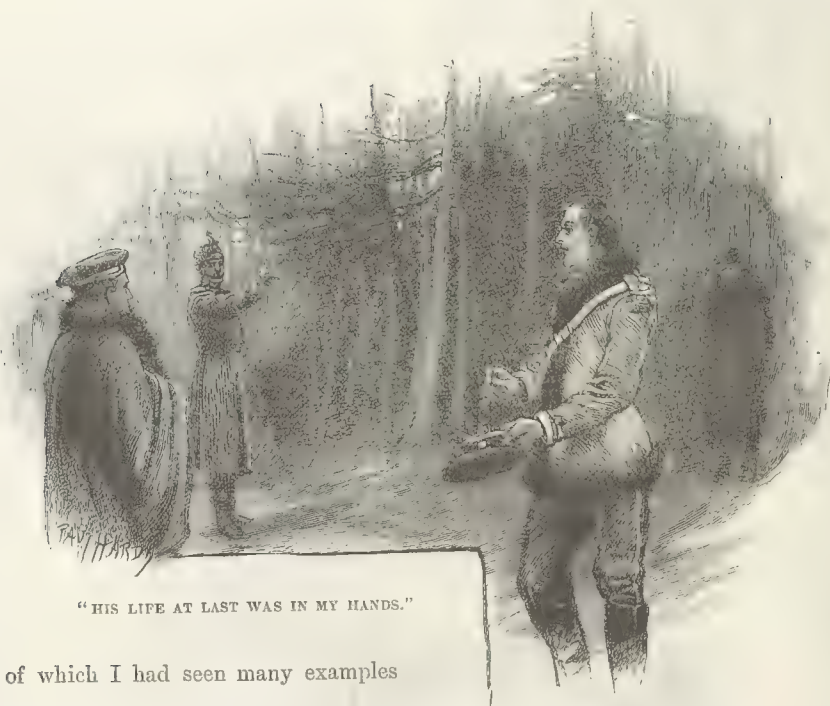
With these words Silvio rose, threw his cap upon the floor, and began pacing up and down the room like a tiger in his cage. I remained silent. Strange contending feelings agitated me. The servant entered and announced that the horses were ready. Silvio grasped my hand tightly. He got into the *telega*, in which lay two trunks—one containing his pistols, the other some personal effects. We wished good-bye a second time, and the horses galloped off.

II.

MANY years passed, and family circumstances obliged me to settle in the poor little village of N—. Engaged in farming, I sighed in secret for my former merry, careless existence. Most difficult of all I found it to pass in solitude the spring and winter evenings. Until the dinner-hour I somehow occupied the time, talking to the *starosta*, driving round to see how the work went on, or visiting the new buildings. But as soon as evening began to draw in, I was at a loss what to do with myself. My books in various bookcases, cupboards, and store-rooms I knew by heart. The housekeeper, Kurilovna, related to me all the stories she could remember. The songs of the peasant women made me melancholy: I tried cherry brandy, but that gave me the headache. I must confess, however, that I had some fear of becoming a drunkard from *ennui*, the saddest kind of drunken-



"WE CLUTCHED OUR SWORDS."



"HIS LIFE AT LAST WAS IN MY HANDS."

ness imaginable, of which I had seen many examples in our district.

I had no near neighbours, with the exception of two or three melancholy ones, whose conversation consisted mostly of hiccoughs and sighs. Solitude was preferable to that. Finally I decided to go to bed as early as possible, and to dine as late as possible, thus shortening the evening and lengthening the day; and I found this plan a good one.

Four versts from my place was a large estate belonging to Count B.; but the steward alone lived there. The Countess had visited her domain once only, just after her marriage; and she then only lived there about a month. However, in the second spring of my retirement, there was a report that the Countess, with her husband, would come to spend the summer on her estate; and they arrived at the beginning of June.

The advent of a rich neighbour is an important event for residents in the country. The landowners and the people of their household talk of it for a couple of months beforehand, and for three years afterwards. As far as I was concerned, I must confess, the expected arrival of a young and beautiful neighbour affected me strongly. I burned with impatience to see her; and the first Sunday after her arrival I started for the village, in order to present myself to the Count and Countess as their near neighbour and humble servant.

The footman showed me into the Count's study, while he went to inform him of my arrival. The spacious room was furnished in a most luxurious manner. Against the wall stood inclosed bookshelves well furnished with books, and surmounted by bronze busts. Over the marble mantelpiece was a large mirror. The floor was covered with green cloth, over which were spread rugs and carpets.

Having got unaccustomed to luxury in my own poor little corner, and not having beheld the wealth of other people for a long while, I was awed; and I awaited the Count with a sort of fear, just as a petitioner from the provinces awaits in an ante-room the arrival of the Minister. The doors opened, and a man, about thirty-two, and very handsome, entered the apartment. The Count approached me with a frank and friendly look. I tried to be self-possessed, and began to introduce myself, but he forestalled me.

We sat down. His easy and agreeable conversation soon dissipated my nervous timidity. I was already passing into my usual manner, when suddenly the Countess entered, and I became more confused than

ever. She was, indeed, beautiful. The Count presented me. I was anxious to appear at ease, but the more I tried to assume an air of unrestraint, the more awkward I felt myself becoming. They, in order to give me time to recover myself and get accustomed to my new acquaintances, conversed with one another, treating me in good, neighbourly fashion, without ceremony. Meanwhile, I walked about the room, examining the books and pictures. In pictures I am no connoisseur; but one of the Count's attracted my particular notice. It represented a view in Switzerland. I was not, however, struck by the painting, but by the fact that it was shot through by two bullets, one planted just on the top of the other.

"A good shot," I remarked, turning to the Count.

"Yes," he replied, "a very remarkable shot. Do you shoot well?" he added.

"Tolerably," I answered, rejoicing that the conversation had turned at last on a subject which interested me. "At a distance of thirty paces I do not miss a card; I mean, of course, with a pistol that I am accustomed to."

"Really?" said the Countess, with a look of great interest. "And you, my dear, could you hit a card at thirty paces?"

"Some day," replied the Count, "we will try. In my own time I did not shoot badly. But it is four years now since I held a pistol in my hand."

"Oh," I replied, "in that case, I bet, Count, that you will not hit a card even at twenty paces. The pistol demands daily practice. I know that from experience. In our regiment I was reckoned one of the best shots. Once I happened not to take a pistol in hand for a whole month: I had sent my own to the gunsmith's. Well, what do you think, Count? The first time I began again to shoot I four times running missed a bottle at twenty paces. The captain of our company, who was a wit, happened to be present, and he said to me: 'Your hand, my friend, refuses to raise itself against the bottle!' No, Count, you must not neglect to practise, or you will soon lose all skill. The best shot I ever knew used to shoot every day, and at least three times every day before dinner. This was as much his habit as the preliminary glass of vodka."

The Count and Countess seemed pleased that I had begun to talk.

"And what sort of a shot was he?" asked the Count.

"This sort, Count: if he saw a fly settle on the wall— You smile, Countess, but I assure you it is a fact. When he saw the fly, he would call out: 'Kouska, my pistol!' Kouska brought him the loaded pistol. A crack, and the fly was crushed into the wall!"

"That is astonishing!" said the Count. "And what was his name?"

"Silvio was his name."

"Silvio!" exclaimed the Count, starting from his seat. "You knew Silvio?"

"How could I fail to know him?—we were comrades; he was received at our mess like a brother-officer. It is now about five years since I last had tidings of him. Then you, Count, also knew him?"

"I knew him very well. Did he never tell you of one very extraordinary incident in his life?"

"Do you mean the slap in the face, Count, that he received from a blackguard at a ball?"

"He did not tell you the name of this blackguard?"

"No, Count, he did not. Forgive me," I added, guessing the truth, "forgive me—I did not—could it really have been you?"

"It was myself," replied the Count, greatly agitated; "and the shots in the picture are a memento of our last meeting."

"Oh, my dear," said the Countess, "for God's sake, do not relate it! It frightens me to think of it."

"No," replied the Count; "I must tell him all. He knows how I insulted his friend. He shall also know how Silvio revenged himself." The Count pushed a chair towards me, and, with the liveliest interest, I listened to the following story:—

"Five years ago," began the Count, "I got married. The honeymoon I spent here, in this village. To this house I am indebted for the happiest moments of my life, and for one of its saddest remembrances.

that he wanted to see me on business. I entered the study, and saw in the darkness a man, dusty and unshaven. He stood there, by the fireplace. I approached him, trying to recollect his face.

"You don't remember me, Count?" he said, in a tremulous voice.

"Silvio!" I cried, and I confess I felt that my hair was standing on end.

"Exactly so," he added. "You owe me a shot; I have come to claim it. Are you ready?" A pistol protruded from his side pocket.

"I measured twelve paces, and stood there in that corner, begging him to fire quickly, before my wife came in.

"He hesitated, and asked for a light. Candles were brought in. I closed the doors, gave orders that no one should enter, and again called upon him to fire. He took out his pistol and aimed.

"I counted the seconds . . . I thought of her . . . A terrible moment passed! Then Silvio lowered his hand.

"I only regret," he said, "that the pistol is not loaded with cherry-stones. My bullet is heavy; and it always seems to me that an affair of this kind is not a duel, but a murder. I am not accustomed to aim at unarmed men. Let us begin again from the beginning. Let us cast lots as to who shall fire first."

"My head went round. I think I objected. Finally, however, we loaded another pistol and rolled up two pieces of paper. These he placed inside his cap; the one through which, at our first meeting, I had put the bullet. I again drew the lucky number.

"Count, you have the devil's luck," he said, with a smile which I shall never forget.

"I don't know what I was about, or how it happened that he succeeded in inducing me. But I fired and hit that picture."



"I FIRED AND HIT THAT PICTURE."

"One afternoon we went out riding together. My wife's horse became restive. She was frightened, got off the horse, handed the reins over to me, and walked home. I rode on before her. In the yard I saw a travelling carriage, and I was told that in my study sat a man who would not give his name, but simply said

The Count pointed with his finger to the picture with the shot-marks. His face had become red with agitation. The Countess was whiter than her own handkerchief, and I could not restrain an exclamation.

"I fired," continued the Count, "and, thank Heaven, missed. Then Silvio—at this moment he was really

terrible — then Silvio raised his pistol to take aim at me.

"Suddenly the door flew open — Masha rushed into the room. She threw herself upon my neck with a loud shriek. Her presence restored to me all my courage.

"My dear,' I said to her, 'don't you see that we are only joking? How frightened you look! Go and drink a glass of water and then come back; I will introduce you to an old friend and comrade.'

"Masha was still in doubt.

"Tell me, is my husband speaking the truth?' she asked, turning to the terrible Silvio; 'is it true that you are only joking?'

"He is always joking, Countess,' Silvio replied. 'He once in a joke gave me a slap in the face; in joke he put a bullet through this cap while I was wearing it; and in joke, too, he missed me when he fired just now.

And now I have a fancy for a joke.' With these words he raised his pistol as if to shoot me down before her eyes!

"Masha threw herself at his feet.

"Rise, Masha! For shame!' I cried in my passion;

'and you, sir, cease to amuse yourself at the expense of an unhappy woman. Will you fire or not?'

"I will not," replied Silvio. 'I am satisfied. I have witnessed your agitation; your terror. I forced you to fire at me. That is enough; you will remember me. I leave you to your conscience.'

"He was now about to go. But he stopped at the door, looked round at the picture which my shot had passed through, fired at it almost without taking aim, and disappeared.

"My wife had sunk down fainting. The servants had not ventured to stop Silvio, whom they looked upon with terror. He passed out to the steps, called his coachman, and before I could collect myself drove off."

The Count was silent. I had now heard the end of the story of which the beginning had long before sur-

prised me. The hero of it I never saw again. I heard, however, that Silvio, during the rising of Alexander Ipsilanti, commanded a detachment of insurgents, and was killed in action.



"MASHA THREW HERSELF AT HIS FEET."



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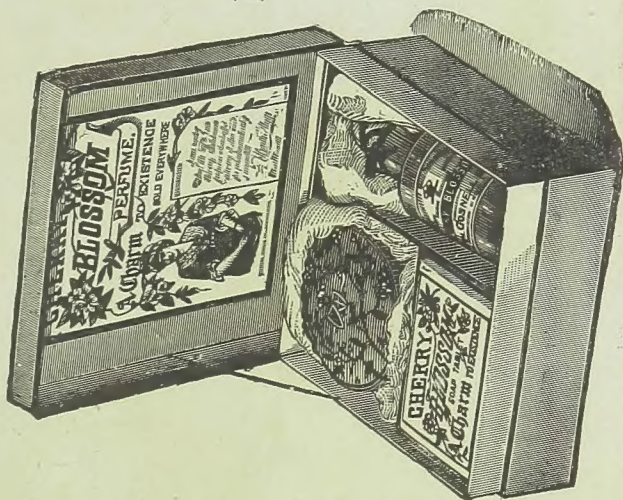
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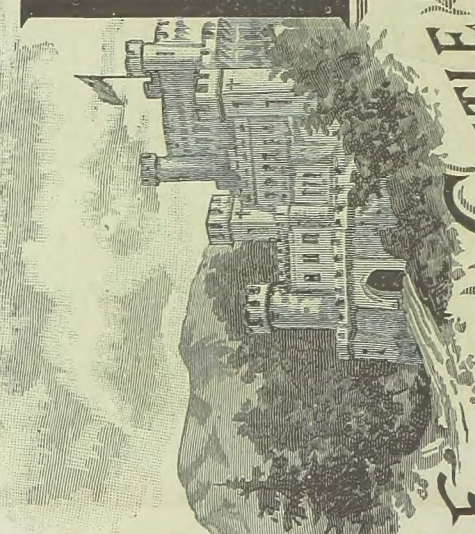
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